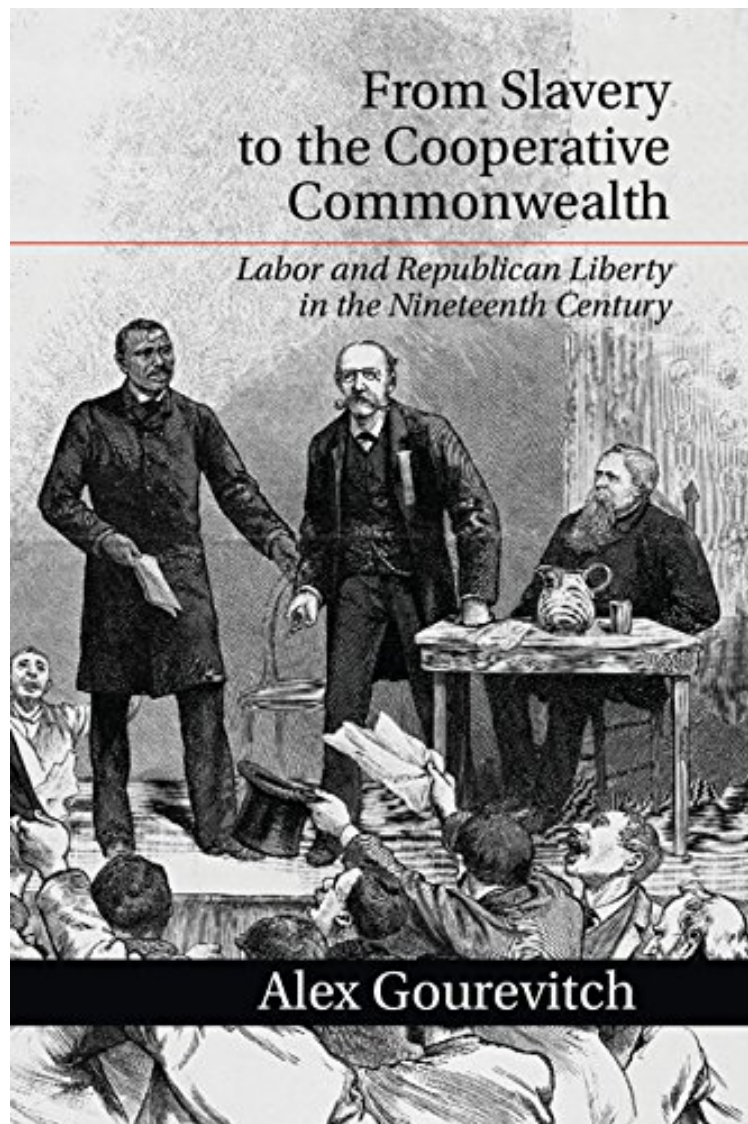


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From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century

Alex Gourevitch

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Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth. Anyone who is interested in how freedom supposedly emerged from the slave societies of ancient Athens and Rome, only to evolve into the paradox of slavery and freedom in 19th Century America, will appreciate Dr. Gourevitch's clear presentation. He explores the concepts of wage labor vs. free labor and how the labor republicans influenced political movements such as the Knights of Labor, among others. Particularly interesting was his chapter titled "Solidarity and Selfishness: The Political Theory of the Dependent Classes" because it examined workers' lives from a sociological and philosophical perspective, exploring the politics of virtue. His conclusion brings his presentation into the 21st Century, with a fascinating discussion of how workers can still hope for a cooperative commonwealth. Meticulously-researched and extremely well-written, Dr. Gourevitch's book was delightful and enlightening.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must read
By Tyler Champine
A must read for anyone interested in the history of republicanism, the cooperative movement, and labor struggles in the United States.
4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Account of Neglected Ideas
By Alan Ryan
Excellent account of some neglected ideas.

This book reconstructs how a group of nineteenth-century labor reformers appropriated and radicalized the republican tradition. These 'labor republicans' derived their definition of freedom from a long tradition of political theory dating back to the classical republics. In this tradition, to be free is to be independent of anyone else's will - to be dependent is to be a slave. Borrowing these ideas, labor republicans argued that wage laborers were unfree because of their abject dependence on their employers. Workers in a cooperative, on the other hand, were considered free because they equally and collectively controlled their work. Although these labor republicans are relatively unknown, this book details their unique, contemporary, and valuable perspective on both American history and the organization of the economy.

"Alex Gourevitch's new book powerfully challenges received understandings of the relationship between liberal and republican ideas and unsettles familiar narratives about the history of American political thought. He shows that republican political theory is not as automatically or easily egalitarian as has often been assumed; that nineteenth-century laissez-faire free labor doctrines themselves made civic and not only liberal claims; and, most importantly and centrally, that those he identifies as 'labor republicans' offered a neglected, fascinating, and distinctively American critique of capitalism and wage labor. From *Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth* is an exciting and highly original work." Jacob T. Levy, Tomlinson Professor of Political Theory, McGill University
"This is a mind-opening study of an American movement in which the republican idea of freedom was invoked in support of workers. It reminds us that, traditionally understood, freedom argues not just for an open market and a transparent state, but for employment and workplace conditions that guard against servitude and servility. The book makes for salutary reading in an age of 'business-friendly' government." Philip Pettit, L. S. Rockefeller University Professor of Politics and Human Values, Princeton University, and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Australian National University
"Every once in a rare while, a book comes along with an argument that, once advanced, not only changes how we think but makes you wonder how we ever could have thought anything else. Alex Gourevitch has written such a book ... The transformative insight at the heart of [this] book is that in the nineteenth century, in the United States, slavery was not a rhetoric but a reality, which drove some of the most breathtaking innovations in how republicans thought about freedom. And once slavery was abolished, its successor - wage slavery, as it was called - drove even more innovations. What emerges from Gourevitch's treatment is a wholesale reconsideration of the republican tradition, in an utterly novel setting ... Once we've read this book and digested its implications, we'll never talk about freedom, republicanism, or domination - not just in the past but in the present - in the same way." Corey Robin, Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center
"Provides a careful examination of labor arguments, uncovering the complex ways advocates 'embraced and recast' republican ideology." Daniel J. McInerney, *The Journal of American History*
About the Author
Alex Gourevitch is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Brown University. He has previously served as an assistant professor at McMaster University, a postdoctoral research associate for Brown University's Political Theory Project, and a College Fellow at Harvard University. Gourevitch is the co-editor of *Politics without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations* (2007). His work has been published in *Political Theory*, *Modern Intellectual History*, *Constellations*, *Public Culture*, *Philosophical Topics*, and the *Journal of Human Rights*. He has also written for magazines such as *Jacobin*, *Dissent*, *Salon*, *The Chronicle*, *N+1*, *The American Prospect*, and *Washington Monthly*, and he is co-author of the blog *The Current Moment*.